

Friends of James Kilgore Press Conference

William Sullivan: these comments are available at www.willsull.net
10 November 2014

Good morning, my name is William Sullivan. I'm a professor of Landscape Architecture in the College of Fine and Applied Arts. I'll provide some background and comments this morning followed by Professors Merle Bowen, D. Fairchild Ruggles, and Teresa Barnes.

On behalf of the Friends of James Kilgore, we thank all of you for coming out today to show your support. We also appreciate the many of thousands of people on our campus and beyond who have signed petitions, written email messages to the BOT, and taken other actions to seek Dr. Kilgore's reinstatement at the University.

This is a long story, but let me start in the middle by taking you back to last April. It was then that Provost Adesida told Dr. Kilgore that he would no longer be employed by the University. But on May 13th, largely in response to the public outcry over the removal of Dr. Kilgore, Provost Adesida established a committee tasked with reviewing "the hiring processes that were used by the Urbana campus, and relevant campus units, for the prior and current employment appointments of James Kilgore."

The Provost also charged the committee with providing "findings regarding how employment decisions were made and conclusions regarding the adequacy of hiring policies and processes that were followed."

In addition, the Provost asked the committee to look more closely at the policies for evaluating criminal background in future employment. Professor Ruggles will speak about that part of the committee's work. I will focus on the committee's review of Dr. Kilgore's employment.

The committee was chaired by Professor Matthew Wheeler of the Department of Animal Sciences. It is clear from reading their report that the committee systematically and energetically addressed each of the tasks identified by the provost. Indeed, they interviewed everyone who was in any way directly involved in employing Dr. Kilgore over the past four years.

Their findings are no surprise. They concluded that "the practices used to hire Mr. Kilgore complied with and followed the accepted policies and practices in place at the time of his various appointments."

They further noted that "all indications are that Mr. Kilgore voluntarily disclosed his prior use of an alias and was open about his criminal convictions..."

Based on these findings, the committee made the following conclusions and recommendations:

"The record demonstrates that Mr. Kilgore has been a successful employee and has contributed to the scholarly and educational missions of the campus in the academic hourly and visiting specialized faculty positions that he has held over the last four years."

The committee concludes by recommending that "Mr. Kilgore be allowed to continue to be employed by the university in accordance with the policies that apply to *all* individuals seeking

employment. Specifically we would endorse the professional judgments of units wishing to hire Mr. Kilgore during the Fall 2014 semester pursuant to the hiring practices currently in place.”

Let me put this in plain English. The committee found that:

- No errors were made
- No corners were cut
- No policies were violated in hiring Dr. Kilgore over these past four years.
- In light of these findings, the committee has called upon the University to re-instate Dr. Kilgore.

It is our understanding that the Board of Trustees is planning to consider a resolution regarding Dr. Kilgore’s employment at their meeting this Thursday, November 13th. Our understanding is that the Board will consider the findings and recommendations of the review committee. We call on the Board of Trustees to do the following four things:

1. Follow the recommendations of the committee and reinstate Dr. Kilgore immediately. This debacle has carried on for far too long. Dr. Kilgore has been denied any income from university employment since May 15th and our university has been denied the skills and experience of an important scholar and an instructor who has twice appeared on the excellent teacher list.
2. Issue a public statement commending the review committee for its work and findings.
3. Refrain from further interference in the hiring decisions made by executive officers and Deans.
4. Recognize the authority of campus administration to carry out their designated duties and responsibilities and remember that the University Statues indicate that the BOT should set policies and secure funding for the University. They should not be engaged in micro-managing our campus or any of the three campuses.

As you all know, in recent months our campus has experienced a crisis of confidence in our BOT and a series of threats to our academic freedom. Indeed, the unfortunate decision to un-hire Professor Stephen Salaita has caused many in our ranks to question the Board’s commitment to academic freedom and transparent decision-making.

In the case of Dr. Kilgore and the report commissioned by the Provost, the Board of Trustees has the opportunity to return to the fundamental principles of how a world class university should operate or continue down a path which will further divide and demoralize faculty and students and undermine our ability to carry out our mission.

It is time for the BOT to re-read the University Statues and return to their traditional role of setting policy and securing funds for our three campuses. They need to get out of the business of micro-managing. We call on them to act on the recommendations of the faculty committee and to immediately reinstate Dr. Kilgore.

That completes my comments. I’ll be happy to take questions after my colleagues have spoken. Now let me call forward Professor Merle Bowen, Director of Center for African Studies.